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\*Hymes 1972b, 661.

<sup>10</sup>See Ninio and Bruner 1978 on picture-book reading. Also, see C. Chomsky 1972 about important features of texts; Snow 1977; Snow and Goldfield 1982; Cochran-Smith, 1983, 1986; Wells 1986; Heath 1982a; and Miller, Nemoianu, and DeJong 1986 about the interaction. Lemish and Rice 1986 compare adult-child conversation while watching television with book reading.

<sup>11</sup>Sinclair and Coulthard 1975.

<sup>12</sup>Lemke 1982, 96, 81.

<sup>13</sup>Griffin and Mehan 1981, 205. In this book, I use the term *structure* to refer to the patterns analyzed by researchers. The terms *rules*, *scripts*, and *schemata*, by contrast, refer to the mental representations of those patterns that we assume must be present in the minds of at least some of the participants. While further differentiation could be made among these mental terms, I have used them interchangeably.

<sup>14</sup>Mehan 1979, 96.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., p. 106.

<sup>16</sup>Erickson 1982b, 178.

<sup>17</sup>Schön 1983 discusses professional practice of all kinds in these terms.

<sup>18</sup>Hymes 1972b, 66.

<sup>19</sup>For discussions of the concept of "canonical form" with this meaning, see Erickson's 1982b musical metaphor; Malcolm's 1982 descriptions of variations on that form in classrooms of Australian Aboriginal students; Willes's 1983 study of young children learning to be pupils; and Cazden's (in press b) review.

<sup>20</sup>The phrase "getting the floor" is from Philips 1983.

<sup>21</sup>Mehan 1979, 80.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., p. 111.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., p. 161.

<sup>24</sup>A related category of classroom formats are "routines"—sequences of behavior that are repeated with little variation and thereby automatized, such as passing out paper—that save valuable classroom time and mental attention. See, for example, Leinhardt, Weidman, and Hammond (in press), a study of routines in elementary-school math lessons.

<sup>25</sup>Lundgren 1977, 202, from which the example is adapted.

<sup>26</sup>McGeorge, personal communication, 1984.

<sup>27</sup>Erickson and Mohatt 1982, 161.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., p. 164.

<sup>29</sup>Lemke 1982, 46.

<sup>30</sup>Stodolsky, Ferguson, and Wimpelberg 1981, 129; also Graybeal and Stodolsky 1985.

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## Chapter 4

# Variations in Lesson Structure

The three-part IRE sequence is the most common sequence in teacher-led speech events. In linguistic terms, it is the "unmarked" pattern. A more informative label comes from computer terminology: IRE is the "default" pattern—what happens unless deliberate action is taken to achieve some alternative.

For example, the word-processing software with which this book was written will print everything in double-spaced lines unless I change one number in a list of printing-format features. Each time I turn the computer off, the memory of that change is lost, and the program goes back to its double spaces. Double space is the default option—doing what comes naturally. So, in the classroom, by the nature of school as an institution, the default pattern of classroom discourse—doing what comes naturally, at least to teachers—is IRE.

But other, more marked, nondefault patterns of teacher-student interaction do occur; and even small changes can have considerable cognitive or social significance.

The purpose of this chapter is to raise awareness of alternatives and suggest ways of thinking about them. We shall explore variations that reflect differences in educational purposes for talk; number of partici-

pants (teacher and one student instead of a group); medium of interaction (electronic mail instead of oral); and cultural differences among students. Surprising as it may seem, there is little research on differences in talk that occur along with differences in student age or grade.

### THE PURPOSES OF TALK

Classrooms are complex social systems for many reasons, not the least of which are the many different purposes of talk. Even if we limit attention to talk that is part of official classroom air time (ignoring unofficial chat during cracks or seams in the daily schedule), and limit it also to talk that is instructional (ignoring, even if teachers can't, the talk that is managerial and procedural), there are still multiple agendas within any single classroom—shifting from hour to hour and even minute to minute.

One important shift is from recitation to something closer to a "real discussion" in order to treat topics that do not fit the lesson structure. It is easy to imagine talk in which ideas are explored rather than answers to teachers' test questions provided and evaluated; in which teachers talk less than the usual two-thirds of the time and students talk correspondingly more; in which students themselves decide when to speak rather than waiting to be called on by the teacher; and in which students address each other directly. Easy to imagine, but not easy to do. Observers have a hard time finding such discussions, and teachers sometimes have a hard time creating them even when they want to.

Fortunately, a few examples have been reported—enough to see what discussions sound like, and to explore why they seem to be so rare. These analyses show changes in three discourse features: speaking rights, the teacher's role, and speech style.<sup>1</sup>

### Speaking Rights

In typical classrooms, the most important asymmetry in the rights and obligations of teacher and students is over control of the right to speak. To describe the difference in the bluntest terms, teachers have the right to speak at any time and to any person; they can fill any silence or interrupt any speaker; they can speak to a student anywhere in the room and in any volume or tone of voice. And no one has any right to object. But not all teachers assume such rights or live by such rules all the time.

The procedures for teacher nomination described by Mehan are typical of lessons. One important feature of discussions is the shift to more self-selection by students, from preallocation of turns by the teacher to more local management of turn taking at the moment of speaking. With

this shift, classroom talk becomes more like informal conversation—not the same as conversation, because there is still the large group of potential speakers and the educational necessity to stick to an agenda, but closer to it.<sup>2</sup>

Here's one example from Vivian Paley's kindergarten classroom, introduced and reported by the teacher:

*[Lisa is telling us the story of "Tico and the Golden Wings" by Leo Lionni. The children and I do not agree about Tico, I applaud him as a nonconformist while they see him as a threat to the community. . . .]*

Teacher: I don't think it's fair that Tico has to give up his golden wings.

Lisa: It is fair. See, he was nicer when he didn't have any wings. They didn't like him when he had gold.

Wally: He thinks he's better if he has golden wings.

Eddie: He is better.

Jill: But he's not supposed to be better. The wishing bird was wrong to give him those wings.

Deanna: She has to give him his wish. He's the one who shouldn't have asked for golden wings.

Wally: He could put black wings on top of the golden wings and try to trick them.

Deanna: They'd sneak up and see the gold. He should just give every bird one golden feather and keep one for himself.

Teacher: Why can't he decide for himself what kind of wings he wants?

Wally: He has to decide to have black wings.<sup>3</sup>

Here's another example, this time from a high school history class. The topic is Louis XIV's treatment of Huguenot dissenters:

T: The treatment that Louis XIV gave to the Huguenots is anything but acceptable, and yet some people say that he was justified in his treatment of the Huguenots, in respect to the point that he was trying to take care of his country. Do you feel that Louis was justified in his treatment of the Huguenots?

S1: I think, you know, they had their rebellion and stuff like that. I don't think he should have gone as far as totally kicking them out of the country and giving them, like, social disgrace, you know, like taking their jobs away from them. If they wouldn't interfere with his way of ruling, and their religion, why should he interfere with them?

S2: He's partially right in what he did, but I don't feel he should've kicked them out, like she said. 'Cause who is he to say how they can . . .

you know? Even though it's all Catholics, he gave 'em, like, religious freedom.

S3: I feel that he had hardly any justification at all. He wound up at the end, as Lydia said, having to almost be persuaded by all the people around him that were saying, "Well, look at the Huguenots." You know, "Why don't you do something about the Huguenots? We don't like the Huguenots". . . . It was one of the last places that he had to conquer, so he figured he'd just go out and then kill them. I think it was totally unfair.

T: OK, I can see where you're coming from, but I don't know if I can totally agree with that. Is there anyone who disagrees with what these people are saying? Marty?

Marty: I don't really disagree, but you know, we know the story, how everything worked out. . . . They wanted to get rid of the Huguenots. And just like that, you know, us here, we don't like somebody, like, you know, Italians and Nazis—sorta the same thing, something like that, in their eyes. I don't think he was justified himself.

S4: OK, in those days the church and state were like the same thing and everything, and so I think, well, like Louis—well, it isn't like today, when you can be a member of a country, just a member of a country. In those days, the church and the country meant the same thing, and when he saw people breaking away from the church, then he thought that they were breaking away from him. And he wanted to stop it. That was about the only thing he could do.

T: So you feel that he was justified in what he was doing, as far as he was concerned—he could justify it to himself.<sup>4</sup>

In both examples, turn taking does not follow the usual lesson sequence. Instead of the teacher regaining the floor after every student turn, there are sequences of turns in which students follow each other without nomination. In the kindergarten, the sequence is

T-S-S-S-S-S-T-S-

In the history class, it is

T-S-S-S-T-S-S-T and continues S-T-S-S-T-S-S-T

The history class may not look like a big change, but it is a significant one. And for students who are used to lesson procedures, it will feel very different too.

The shift away from teacher nomination eliminates the need for students to raise their hands. In the high school discussion, at the end of the second utterance by T, he nominates one student (Marty) by name, presumably because Marty (and maybe others as well) raised hands in response to T's question "Is there anyone who disagrees . . . ?" It is not easy for students or teacher to refrain from well-learned habits.

I remember a small seminar at Harvard that had been meeting for several months discussing Marxist writings on education. I played a relatively minor role, intellectually as well as managerially; and student self-selection was the norm. But once, when I did take a turn to speak, the next student momentarily lost his sense of this particular discussion context and, much to everyone else's amusement, started to raise his hand.

Related to the change to more self-selection of turns, but not following from it automatically, is a change in how speakers refer to each other and to the teacher. In most lessons, the teacher is the addressee for all student utterances, and references to other students' talk are rare. In the history excerpt, note S2's phrase "as Lydia said." Later, another student begins, "I think Marty is wrong." Students refer to each other, but in the third person, and T is still the direct addressee.

Still closer to conversation among equals and harder to find in schools is students addressing each other directly. Lemke calls this "cross-discussion" and looked for it in his study of high school science classrooms:

Cross-Discussion is dialog between students in which teacher is not a constant intermediary. Such dialogue is rare as part of the public discourse of the science classroom. . . . Public cross-discussion is signalled when one student addresses another publicly rather than addressing teacher. . . . When one hears a student say, "I think you forgot . . .," in place of (to teacher) "I think she forgot . . ." cross-discussion is taking place. Similarly if teacher is referred to in the third person.<sup>5</sup>

Such cross-discussion, with students addressing each other directly, occurred often in a class of fifteen-year-olds in a London comprehensive school, perhaps not only because the teacher encouraged it but also because he taught an integrated English and social-studies course to the same group of students for five years. The school is in Hackney Downs, then one of the poorest districts in London. The class included students from Africa and the Caribbean as well as white working-class families. English educator Alex McLeod recorded one discussion on the place of Afro-Caribbean culture in the school curriculum. The teacher, John Hardcastle, started with a question:

Really what I'm working around to is asking a big question, that is, is all this business about racism something that's only of interest to black people, or is it something that's got to be important for everybody?

At one point, discussion goes back and forth between David (whose family came from Trinidad) and Ricky (who is white). Note the use of

you and the addressee's first name (in the turns marked with an arrow in the left margin):

- David:* It goes back to the days of slavery. . . .
- *Ricky:* David, how can white people accept the full of what their ancestors done?
- David:* They can recognize that it's not them.
- *Ricky:* Don't you reckon that black people know that? Don't you think that black people are using that as an excuse, sort of, to ask for more sympathy?
- *David:* Don't you think that some white people don't even know about the history of black people? . . ."

Not evident in these transcripts, and hard to determine even on videotape, is eye gaze, particularly of student speakers. In the typical lesson, students look at the teacher while speaking. She is the only official addressee. Philips describes the usual pattern:

While the teacher is speaking, the students look at the teacher much more often than elsewhere. And when a student is speaking, the student designates the teacher as the addressed recipient of the speech by looking at [her]. Peers, in turn, do not gaze at the speaker's face nearly as often as the teacher does. They look more often at the teacher listening than they look at the student who is speaking. As often as not, while one student is speaking, the other students do not look at anyone, but gaze off in the distance or downward.

This pattern of gaze direction supports an impression conveyed by the system for regulating talk that students are not supposed to play a role in regulating the talk of their peers. A child's claim to the floor is validated by the teacher, both verbally and visually, or not at all, in the official structure of talk.<sup>7</sup>

One primary teacher, who valued real discussion but admitted difficulty in getting it to happen, told me that she tried to avoid looking at the child who was speaking. Rude as this might seem, she felt it encouraged the speaker to make eye contact with peers, and made it more likely that another child would self-select to be the next speaker.

These changes cannot happen unless students can see one another. Discussion is almost impossible—for anyone, not just students—when seats are in rows. One experimental study compared the behavior of three fifth-grade classes brainstorming ideas for writing assignments. Each class was observed three times—while the students were seated in rows, clusters, and a circle. The circle arrangement produced the least

hand raising, the most on-task comments not in response to teacher nominations, and the fewest indications of student withdrawal from the class activity. The authors concluded with a simple recommendation: "Teachers who wish to facilitate pupil interaction during discussion sessions would be wise to consider arranging desks in circles."<sup>8</sup>

Moving chairs can seem a nuisance in classrooms, especially with young children who have to learn how to carry them in safe ways. But, in addition to the particular value of a circle for discussion, it may be generally helpful, especially for young children, to have different physical arrangements for events where different discourse norms prevail. Just as learning a second language is facilitated by the separation of languages by setting, learning to shift ways of speaking should be helped by such visual signals as well.<sup>9</sup>

### The Teacher's Role

In a series of studies, J. T. Dillon—from whose research the history-class example is taken—has been trying to understand why discussion is so hard to achieve. His conclusion is that what "foils" discussion, surprising as it may seem, is teacher questions, and with them the fast pace of lesson interactions.<sup>10</sup>

*Teacher Questions.* In lessons, the teacher asks questions to which she almost invariably knows the answer (often called test questions) and evaluates student answers. In discussions, her role not only is reduced in quantity but has to be changed in function as well.

Consider again the three examples just cited. The kindergarten teacher makes one comment, asks one sincere (nontest) question, and does no evaluating. The history teacher asks two sincere questions, makes one comment, and expresses one disagreement. The London teacher starts off with "a big question," intervenes to probe further ("Sunday"—from Nigeria—"what would you say if you took a white middle-class teacher that was going to come and work in an area like this . . . and says 'Why should I bring in black materials, because all it's going to do is divide kids?' ") and makes space for someone to be heard ("Go on, David, then Kevin speak.")<sup>11</sup>

For the teacher, this change away from a series of questions is more than a change in surface verbal behavior. At the heart of the shift from lesson to discussion is a different conception of knowledge and teaching. At the end of chapter 3, I suggested that the lesson is an interactional format that fits knowledge that is factual and can be evaluated as right or wrong, and can be subdivided into short units for demonstration in short student answers. As Stodolsky and her colleagues point out, some school content is like that—arithmetic facts and geographical informa-

tion, for example. But kindergarten children's conception of fairness, and high school students' understanding of the treatment of dissenters or the question of who should learn about racism, are different kinds of knowledge that require a different kind of discourse structure.

Unfortunately, a change of teacher intent is not sufficient. Teachers and students alike are well practiced in lesson behavior, and talking in another way doesn't come easily. I suggested earlier some specific ways of encouraging a shift in turn taking. Dillon has some suggestions for alternatives to the usual teacher questions:

1. Declarative statements—as in the kindergarten T's opening.
2. Reflective restatements—as in the history T's last comment.
3. Invitations to elaborate—as in the London teacher's question to Sunday.
4. And (hardest of all) silence.<sup>12</sup>

*Pace.* Most research on classroom discourse is not done with a stopwatch. While great care may be taken to transcribe talk of one speaker that overlaps that of another, attention is not usually given to the absence of talk, to the placement and duration of silence.

One science educator, Mary Budd Rowe, has made this the major focus of her research for the past twenty years. In a recent summary of all this work—in classrooms from elementary school to college, from special-education teachers to museum guides—Rowe confirms her earlier findings that “when teachers ask questions of students, they typically wait 1 second or less for the students to start a reply; after the student stops speaking they begin their reaction or proffer the next question in less than 1 second.” And, by contrast, when teachers wait for three seconds or more, especially after a student response, “there are pronounced changes in student use of language and logic as well as in student and teacher attitudes and expectations.”<sup>13</sup>

Rowe describes the “pronounced changes” of increased wait time:

1. Teachers' responses exhibit greater flexibility, indicated by the occurrence of fewer discourse errors and greater continuity in the development of ideas.
2. Teachers ask fewer questions, and more of them are cognitively complex.
3. Teachers become more adept at using student responses—possibly because they, too, are benefiting from the opportunity afforded by the increased time to listen to what students say.
4. Expectations for the performances of certain students seem to improve, and some previously invisible people become visible.
5. Students are no longer restricted to responding to teacher questions

and get to practice all four of the moves. (Rowe adds “structuring” to the three-part sequence of soliciting, responding, and reacting.<sup>14</sup>)

So many significant changes from a seemingly small change in pace! Like the shift away from teacher questions, the shift to a slower interactional pace may seem like a change only in superficial behavior. But here too there is an important relationship to implicit conceptions of knowledge. In Rowe's words:

A complex thought system requires a great deal of shared experience and conversation. It is in talking about what we have done and observed, and in arguing about what we make of our experiences, that ideas multiply, become refined, and finally produce new questions and further explorations.<sup>15</sup>

Increasing wait time is easier to describe than to do. Rowe reports the kind of in-service supervision and support it requires, particularly if it is to be sustained and incorporated into the teacher's routine enactment of her role. In Rowe's words, “There are role and norm transformations taking place,” and the teachers need a chance to talk about their experience of this change.<sup>16</sup>

In addition to the educational benefits that result from Rowe's interventions, her work yields an important insight into the nature of classroom discourse: the features found in any classroom are part of a complex system, and a change in any one will inevitably entail changes in others.

Speech 01